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Fundamental Hope and Practical Identity

Claudia Blöser^a and Titus Stahl ^b

Abstract: This article considers the question ‘What makes hope rational?’ We take Adrienne Martin’s recent incorporation analysis of hope as representative of a tradition that views the rationality of hope as a matter of instrumental reasons. Against this tradition, we argue that an important subset of hope, ‘fundamental hope’, is not governed by instrumental rationality. Rather, people have reason to endorse or reject such hope in virtue of the contribution of the relevant attitudes to the integrity of their practical identity, which makes the relevant hope not instrumentally but intrinsically valuable. This argument also allows for a new analysis of the reasons people have to abandon hope and for a better understanding of non-fundamental, ‘prosaic’ hopes.

Introduction

In this article, we want to examine the question ‘What makes hope rational?’ While much of the current literature on hope focuses on the instrumental rationality of hope, we suggest that instrumental considerations do not exhaust the reasons we can have to hope. To make this argument, we focus on hopes that play a crucial role in how people see and interpret their own lives. Such hopes, even though they may also promote the interests of the relevant agent, are rational primarily because they are *constitutive of her practical identity*. We call this kind of hope ‘fundamental hope’, and we argue that the existence of this kind of hope poses a challenge to contemporary theories of hope.

Our argument proceeds from Adrienne Martin’s recent account of the rationality of hope (Section 1). Martin suggests that what makes hope rational is the practical benefit of engaging in hopeful activities. We argue in Section 2 that this instrumentalism does not fully capture the value of hope.

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In Section 3, we introduce our main claim: There are cases where it is rational for people to hope, but where the relevant reasons are non-instrumental. Instead, the reason to hope is the fact that maintaining hope allows the person to uphold her practical identity. In such cases of fundamental hope, agents have reason not to lose hope because losing hope would require giving up important aspects of their identities. As hope does not support the relevant practical identity in the sense of being a means to an end but is rather a constitutive part of it, it follows that we can have non-instrumental reasons to hope. This requires a new understanding of hope that also enables a more convincing analysis of the question of when it is rational to lose hope. In Section 4, we consider whether our analysis also sheds light on the rationality of everyday, ‘prosaic’ hopes.

Section 1: The Incorporation Thesis

Traditionally, the philosophy of hope takes as its starting point what has been called the ‘orthodox definition’¹ or the ‘standard account’,² which analyzes hope in terms of a wish or desire for an outcome and a belief concerning the outcome’s possibility.³

By analyzing hope as a combination of a belief and a desire, this orthodox definition suggests that we have reason to hope for something if and only if we have reason to believe in the possibility of its occurring and to desire its occurrence. But clearly, the question of what we have reason to hope for is not adequately answered with the advice that we ought to hope for every possible and desirable event.

Reasons for believing in an event’s possibility and for desiring its occurrence do not always lead to a reason to hope for that event; what is more, however, hope is also often supported by reasons that cannot be reduced to the reasons that support the underlying beliefs and desires. For

1 Martin, *How We Hope*, 11.

2 Meirav, ‘The Nature of Hope,’ 217.

3 For an overview of historical and contemporary accounts, see also Blöser/Stahl, ‘Hope’.

example, we often encourage people who suffer from potentially deadly illnesses, such as cancer, to continue hoping. We do so not only because we think that their desire for health and their belief in the possibility of recovery are rational but also because we assume that they have reason to *endorse* their desire and belief.

A modification of the orthodox conception has recently been advanced by Adrienne Martin's defense of the 'Incorporation Thesis'.⁴ On this picture, hope involves more than a person's desiring an outcome and believing that it is possible. That person must also see herself as justified in endorsing those beliefs and desires as reasons for pursuing valuable activities such as planning and fantasizing. This more complex analysis promises to offer further resources for explaining hope's rationality. Because Martin avoids the pitfalls of the orthodox definition, her account deserves further attention. We raise an objection to her theory in Section 2, and, on this basis, we propose a characterization of the rationality of hope that makes room for non-instrumental reasons to hope.

Martin first describes a number of *feelings* and *activities* that she assumes to be characteristic of hope. In particular, these are the activities of planning, where possible, for the outcome (although usually with a backup plan) and fantasizing about it (that is, imagining it as part of a narrative with an egoistic function). These activities are usually accompanied by certain feelings (like anticipation).⁵ Martin subsequently defines hope as a combination of attitudes that are such that an agent *stands ready to justify* her engaging in such activities (or is disposed to do so).⁶ In contrast to the orthodox definition, it is not sufficient for an agent to believe that some outcome is possible, but not certain, and to desire it. Rather, the agent must take her desire as a reason that speaks in favor of engaging in the activities characteristic of hope. The

4 Martin, *How We Hope*.

5 Ibid., 22, 25ff., 29ff.

6 Ibid., 24, 36.

Incorporation Thesis thus amounts to the claim that hope in the fullest sense⁷ involves four elements:

1. An agent who hopes is attracted to the outcome.
2. The agent believes the outcome to be possible, but not certain.
3. The agent treats her belief about the possibility and uncertainty of the outcome's occurring *as licensing* activities characteristic of hoping (planning, fantasizing, and entertaining feelings like anticipation). The possibility of the outcome is treated not as a reason to hope but as an 'enabling condition' for other reasons.⁸ This does not require that the agent change her beliefs about the probability of the outcome. It only requires that she see her beliefs as not advising against certain activities.⁹
4. Fourth, the agent must treat her attraction to the outcome¹⁰ (or the outcome's attractive features) *as a practical reason* to engage in the activities characteristic of hope.

According to the *Incorporation Thesis*, hope involves incorporating the desire into the agent's rational scheme of ends. Through the concept of 'incorporation', Martin refers to a broadly Kantian theory of motivation, according to which rational agency necessarily involves the capacity to reflect on one's desires or attractions and, as a result, to endorse or reject them as reasons for acting. Endorsing a state of attraction means 'incorporating' it into one's rational agency and being disposed to justify one's action by citing it as a reason. Applied to hope, this means that a hoping person (a) is attracted

7 Martin does not aim to provide a definition of hope in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and instead gives a 'syndrome account' (62) that characterizes the fullest sense of hope in paradigmatic cases.

8 Ibid., 44.

9 Ibid., 45.

10 Martin uses 'attraction' as a stand-in for what is often called 'desire', but only in the sense of a non-rational state of being drawn to something, as opposed to desire in a rationalist sense as seeing something as reason-giving (see *ibid.*, 25). She analyzes the latter, rationalist kind of desire as the 'incorporation' of the brute attraction into the agent's rational agency through a normative judgment. See *ibid.*, 58ff.

to an outcome and (b) endorses her being attracted as a reason to perform hopeful activities (thereby ‘incorporating’ her state of being attracted into her rational agency).¹¹

While the account given thus far is a *descriptive* account of hope, the *normative* question concerning when it is rational to hope can be answered by considering which norms govern each of the components (i.e., the adoption and revision of the different attitudes).¹² While the state of being attracted is sub-rational and thus not subject to normative governance,¹³ and while the belief in a certain probability of the outcome’s occurring is subject only to theoretical norms, the other two attitudes (licensing, treating as a reason) are subject to practical norms, which Martin spells out as ‘norms of rational end-promotion’.¹⁴ Taking up the licensing stance and treating one’s attraction to the outcome as a reason is, according to this norm, justified whenever it coheres with and promotes a rational scheme of ends.¹⁵ She describes the connection between descriptive and normative aspects of the licensing stance as follows:

[W]hether it is successful or defective as the kind of state that it is depends on its responsiveness to considerations of rational ends-promotion.¹⁶

This characterization of hope improves upon the orthodox definition and its extensions in a crucial respect: It acknowledges that hope involves engaging in a range of characteristic activities (or at least the disposition to do so). The rationality of hope might therefore be accounted for not only by referring to the rationality of the underlying beliefs and desires but also by the reasons the person has to engage in those further activities. Martin

11 Martin, *How We Hope*, 25. By appealing to the notion of ‘incorporation’, Martin refers to Kant’s claim that incentives can only determine us to action insofar as we have incorporated them into our maxims (see Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, 49 (=AA6:24); Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, 39f.).

12 Ibid., 36.

13 Ibid., 37.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 38. Martin draws here on Rawls’s conception of a rational life plan, as laid out in Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 407ff.

16 Martin, *How We Hope*, 51.

also acknowledges, correctly in our view, that hope's rationality is mainly a question of *practical* rationality (as long as the outcome is neither impossible nor certain).

Section 2: Beyond the Incorporation Thesis

Despite these advantages, we argue that Martin's account is insufficient because she adopts an *instrumentalist analysis* of reasons to hope. Martin suggests that what makes the incorporation of hopeful attitudes into our agency rational is only the *practical benefit* of having them. While we do not want to deny that hope can be instrumentally rational, we argue that there is a range of cases in which the rationality of hope cannot be accounted for by referring to its practical benefits.

These cases involve a specific type of hope, which we call 'fundamental hope'. By this we mean forms of hope that play a particularly important role in people's lives. Imagine a cancer patient's hope for a full recovery, a political activist's hope for the end of world hunger, or a religious person's hope for life after death. In each of these cases, the hope in question plays a crucial role in how that person sees and interprets the world. This can be contrasted with cases of 'prosaic' hope, where hope has no major influence on a person's outlook on life – such as the hope that the weather will be nice on the day of one's garden party. A useful theory of hope must help us to understand why hopes of the first kind are sometimes rational, since these are the cases where the rationality of hope matters most.

On Martin's account, treating an attraction as a reason is justified if it coheres with or benefits a rational scheme of ends.¹⁷ She illustrates this with the following example of two cancer patients, one of whom hopes for recovery while the other does not:

As long as [an activity characteristic of hope] promotes one's rational ends and does not cause one to irrationally adjust one's probability assignment, this powerful hope is rational. To return to Alan and Bess, the cancer research participants: their hopes are different not because they desire a cure to different degrees or

17 '[H]ope is successful as the state it is, so long as it promotes her [the agent's] rational ends to do these things [i.e., engage in hopeful activities, CB/TS]' (Ibid., 38).

assign different probability estimates to a cure, but because they incorporate these attitudes into their rational schemes of ends differently. Alan invests less in the possibility of a cure: he thinks the slim chance of benefiting from his trial participation licenses only a small amount of positive feeling, thought, and planning centered on a cure. Bess, by contrast, sees the same slim chance as licensing a great deal of such investment. The point that now emerges is that they may both be fully rational. If Bess's rational scheme of ends coheres with, or even benefits from, such investment – perhaps she needs such a strong investment to keep her scheme from falling apart, and if this is so, then her hope is rational.¹⁸

According to Martin, Bess treats her attraction to an outcome – recovery – not as a reason to *pursue that outcome* but as a reason to *engage in the activities characteristic of hope*. But what does it mean to say that the act of treating one's attraction towards an outcome as a reason to hope for that outcome is justified because it coheres with a rational scheme of ends? The answer to this question depends on what exactly it is that is supposed to cohere with that scheme.

There are three possibilities when it comes to interpreting this claim:

- 1) One could interpret Martin as claiming that it is rational to treat one's being attracted to an outcome as a reason to engage in hopeful activities if *the outcome to which one is attracted* coheres with or benefits one's rational scheme of ends. This seems most plausible in cases where the realization of the outcome depends at least partly on the agent's actions. In these cases, hoping is instrumentally rational insofar as it motivates the agent to pursue the outcome and thereby serves to promote a rational end – the outcome itself. But not all cases of fundamental hope are of this type. In many cases of fundamental hope, such as Bess's, the agent cannot promote the hoped-for outcome. In such cases, hope cannot be instrumentally valuable in virtue of promoting its object. Furthermore, it is unclear how the coherence of the outcome with our scheme of ends could make certain kinds of hopeful activity rational

¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

where these activities are not directed at realizing any end at all (for example, fantasizing). Coherence of the object of hope with one's scheme of ends therefore does not make the activity of hoping instrumentally rational in cases where hoping does not or cannot promote its object.

- 2) One could interpret Martin as claiming that it is rational to treat one's being attracted to an outcome as a reason to engage in hopeful activities if *the end of these activities* (i.e., the end of fantasizing, anticipating or planning) coheres with or benefits one's rational scheme of ends. This is implausible, however, when it comes to fantasizing and anticipating, which do not seem to be typically directed towards achieving an end (they have objects, but not ends). Planning, by contrast, might very well be instrumentally valuable because of the end it serves. That is, at least some of the activities characteristic of hoping might be instrumentally valuable with respect to their ends. In such cases, we want to argue that there might still be another dimension of rationality that complements the instrumental rationality of hope. Also, it would be hasty to assume that hope can be made rational simply in virtue of planning's having some positive effect. This is because the positive effect of planning might only be contingently connected to the hope that motivated the planning. Assume, for example, that I hope to win the Nobel Prize in chemistry some day and that I plan for this outcome by saving a little money each month to spend on sightseeing in Oslo when I eventually attend the award ceremony. According to the presently discussed interpretation, my planning activity would be justified (and thus my hope to do so would be rational) if the *end of that planning* (my having sufficient resources for sightseeing in Oslo) coheres with my rational scheme of ends. Even if I never win the Nobel Prize, it may very well be the case that this end coheres with my rational life plan. While the activity of planning itself might therefore be considered reasonable, this does not seem to support the idea that my *taking my attraction to winning the Nobel Prize as a reason to*

engage in this activity is thereby reasonable. The reasons why the activities constitutive of the hope are justified are, on this interpretation, completely disconnected from any feature of my attraction.

- 3) Finally, we could interpret Martin as claiming that it is rational to treat one's attraction to an outcome as a reason to engage in hopeful activities if the *consequences* or *effects* of one's engaging in these activities *or* simply engaging in the activities themselves coheres with my rational scheme of ends. The inherently pleasurable aspect of a good fantasy, or of warm feelings of anticipation, could itself contribute to my rational scheme of ends, and thereby be practically rational. But if this makes the hope rational, then this seems to entail that *any* positive effect that my hope might have (like lifting my mood) would make it rational, as long as hoping does not come with significant costs (e.g., if the good mood leads me to make really imprudent decisions). In other words, the justification for why we treat our beliefs and attractions as reasons would then be purely instrumental.¹⁹

At first sight, this third argument does not seem objectionable: Even minor benefits of hopeful activities, one might think, might be enough to make hope rational if the cost-to-benefit ratio is better for hoping than for alternative attitudes. However, we think that this third interpretation is inappropriately instrumentalist in the sense that it focuses *only* on the beneficial effects of hoping for the pursuit of the agent's other ends, irrespective of the relation of the content of the agent's hope to those ends. The problem with this kind of instrumentalism is that it evaluates our hoping for certain things exclusively in terms of the question of how 'giving in' to the attraction would

19 To be more precise, we should distinguish between two elements of hope: first, the attitude of treating certain considerations as reasons, and second, the activities for which they are treated as reasons (e.g., fantasizing). As Bovens ('The Value of Hope,' 673) correctly remarks, these activities and the mental states they involve might be seen as intrinsically valuable (because fantasizing or feeling good might have value). But, even on such an account, if someone asks us why we treat our attraction as a reason to engage in these activities, we would have to say that doing so is a means to the end of feeling well.

affect the promotion of our rational ends, without acknowledging that there are cases where a reasonable person might reject hope despite such benefits and that there are cases where people have reason to hope despite the lack of clear benefits.

To illustrate the first possibility, consider a case where practical benefits would accrue to a person if she took up hopeful attitudes, but where she nevertheless can reasonably refrain from hoping. A cancer patient might, for example, consider it inappropriate to hope for a very unlikely recovery, even if such hopes would benefit her overall. She might view such hopes as incompatible with her own self-image as a rational person, for example, because in her eyes they betray a deluded, self-absorbed perspective on the world: the expression of a child-like expectation that things will always work out in one's favor. Adopting a hopeful attitude would be inappropriate given her own self-understanding. It does not seem far-fetched to say that she consequently has reason to refrain from hoping *even if continuing to hope would have positive effects*.

This shows that the fact that acting on some attraction would promote a rational scheme of ends is not by itself a reason to endorse an attraction. Rather, one can imagine many cases where we have reason to refrain from endorsing an attraction because it is incompatible with our self-understanding, even if incorporating it into our agency would promote our rational scheme of ends overall. From the broadly Kantian perspective that Martin endorses, the effects of incorporating an attraction into one's agency should not be all that matters.

The second possibility can be illustrated by considering the case of a political activist: Even if her hoping for political change does not generate any recognizable benefits for her or promote any ends, such a person can still have reason to hope. We suggest that in this and similar cases, the reason to engage in the relevant hopeful activities (such as anticipating, planning for and fantasizing about the outcome) is the fact that *these hopeful activities are essential to the hopeful person's being the person she is and that it is therefore non-instrumentally rational for her to continue hoping*. This suggestion will be defended in the next section.

Section 3: Hope and Practical Identity

So far, we have argued that the way in which fundamental hope is sensitive to reasons is not adequately captured by the idea that hope exclusively ought to promote or cohere with an agent's ends.

If this argument is convincing, Martin's incorporation thesis needs to be supplemented: In cases of fundamental hope, the central reason to engage in the activities and attitudes characteristic of hope is the fact that the agent sees engaging in these activities as a constitutive part of her identity. When hopeful activities and attitudes form an essential part of a person's identity, that person has reason to engage in such activities. Her reason for hoping, we suggest, is non-instrumental in such cases: She does not hope because this is a means to an end but because such hope constitutes her as the kind of person she is. In Martin's discussion, there are a few points where she suggests a picture that is similar to our proposal, which she does not pursue further. According to this picture, the rationality of hope is not that of end promotion but that of upholding one's personal integrity: Hope might prevent a scheme of ends 'from falling apart'.²⁰ On this interpretation, we cannot always assume that there is a preceding scheme of ends into which hope either does or does not fit. Rather, the scheme of ends is often itself partially constituted by some of the hopes of the agent. Therefore, maintaining hope can be rational if the relevant hope is a constituent part of a scheme of ends that one has reason to uphold. This account of the rationality of hope avoids the objections laid out above in particular as it allows for reasons to hope that go beyond end promotion.

We consequently argue that, for a certain subset of hope, i.e., fundamental hope, the following analysis holds: Fundamental hope for an outcome O is a combination of attitudes. As in Martin's account, this includes a belief in the possibility (but not the inevitability) of O's occurring and an attraction to O, as well as taking the belief component to license certain practical attitudes. Also in accordance with Martin, we assume that a hopeful person

20 Martin, *How We Hope*, 63.

usually takes the belief component to license (but not rationalize) feelings of anticipation and attraction and engagement in hopeful activities. In the case of fundamental hope, however, what justifies this incorporation of the belief and the attraction into the agency of the hopeful person is the *constitutive role of these hopeful attitudes when it comes to the agent's identity*. That is, we point out reasons for taking up the licensing stance that are not related to the promotion of ends but are rather connected to the role that hope plays in the agent's identity.

To put it more succinctly, Martin argues that the belief component licenses our treating the *attraction* (and the attractive features of the outcome) as a reason to engage in hopeful activities, and that the *instrumental value* of our doing so makes the incorporation of the attraction into our agency rational. We argue that the belief component licenses our treating the attraction as a reason to have hopeful attitudes and to pursue hopeful activities, and that the fact that these attitudes contribute to our practical identity makes it rational to do so.

It follows that the rationality of hope is not always adequately captured in terms of the instrumental rationality of end promotion and that we can have non-instrumental reasons to hope to the extent that our hoping forms a necessary part of a valuable practical identity.

To motivate this proposal, reconsider two cases of fundamental hope: the cancer patient who continues to hope despite the low probability of her recovery, and the political activist who hopes for the end of global inequality in full knowledge of its unlikelihood. In both cases, the hopeful person can be justified in believing that she *ought not to lose hope*. If this belief is appropriate, *remaining hopeful* must be rational or justified from her point of view.

We argue that the primary reason to continue to hope in these cases is not that hope promotes a rational end of theirs. The positive effects of the agents' hope can only justify engaging in the relevant activities when hope itself is *already* judged to be rational. As mentioned above, a cancer patient might reject hope, despite its potential positive effects, because hoping would express a deluded perspective that the person rejects on the basis of a certain self-conception. Contrast this case with a similar case

where hope, even though it does not come with any benefits, is nevertheless justified. If the cancer patient and the activist have good reason to keep their hopes up, even in the absence of instrumental considerations, then this reason must be connected to features of hope itself, not the effects of hoping. We propose that in cases of fundamental hope the crucial condition is that the identity of the agent must be partly constituted by a certain *perspective on the world* in which certain considerations count as reason-giving, and that giving up hope would entail the unavailability of those lines of reasoning. If the cancer patient resigns herself to dying and the activist resigns herself to never witnessing the realization of her political vision, they may forswear actively anticipating the relevant outcome and spending mental energy on it because they see themselves as no longer licensed to treat the importance of the hopeful activities as a reason to engage in them. Insofar as they are resigned to their fate, it is no longer true that certain considerations constitute reasons for them to act. If it is true that being responsive to certain reasons is constitutive of an individual's practical identity, then adopting a perspective of resignation endangers parts of their identity. To the extent that they want to maintain their identity, they have reason to resist such a change of perspective and to maintain hope. Even though considerations of costs and benefits might (or even should) enter the agent's deliberation about what to do, the fact that the hopeful activities form part of a person's practical identity provides a reason to continue to hope that may outweigh the reasons given by cost-benefit analysis.

Why does the fact that hope sustains a practical identity give us non-instrumental reasons to hope? This is because the hope in question is not an attitude that supports an identity in the sense that it causally contributes to the presence of a different identity – rather, the hope is an essential part of the identity itself. Thus, the relation between fundamental hope and identity is not one of means and end, but one of part and whole.

We may now turn to the question of hope's value. *Prima facie*, if we have non-instrumental reason to hope, it seems that hope is also non-instrumentally valuable. Following Joseph Raz, we hold that something is instrumentally valuable 'to the extent that it derives its value from the value of its

consequences, or from the consequences it is likely to have'.²¹ Fundamental hope is *intrinsically* valuable insofar as it is valuable apart from its instrumental value. At the same time, hope is derivatively valuable because it derives its value from its contribution to a morally valuable practical identity. If one's hopes are connected to a bad identity (consider, for example, a mafioso's hope to make more money by becoming more skilled at blackmailing), it certainly is not to be judged valuable. That is, even though the value of fundamental hope is independent of its instrumental value, it still derives its value from its contribution to a morally valuable practical identity. It is this practical identity that is *ultimately* (i.e., non-derivatively) valuable. Of course, this also entails that, if the identity in question is not, in fact, ultimately valuable, then the hope that supports it is not intrinsically valuable (or at least it does not derive value from its supporting this identity).

The claim that we have non-instrumental reasons to hope also bears a certain resemblance to a suggestion made by Luc Bovens. Bovens argues that some hopes are essential to engaging in intrinsically valuable activities, such as loving, and they can therefore have non-instrumental value for agents.²² While this is a step in the right direction, Bovens confines the constitutive role of hope to one intrinsically valuable activity, namely the activity of love. In general, and with regards to its role in self-respect in particular, love is an intrinsically valuable attitude that is essential to sustaining our practical identities. However, the exclusive focus on love is too narrow. There are other commitments that can be equally constitutive of a person's identity, for instance political or moral convictions, or religious belief. All of these commitments make certain forms of reasoning available to the agents who endorse them, enabling them to consider reasons that would not otherwise be available. This entails that there is a plurality of non-instrumental reasons to hope. We would like to accommodate the fact that different people may reasonably have different fundamental hopes, depending on their different practical identities.

21 Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 177f.

22 Bovens, 'The Value of Hope,' 676ff.

Because the notion of a practical identity is essential for to our claim that we may have non-instrumental reasons to hope, we will first examine how hopes and practical identities can be related (3.1). Thereafter, we will then discuss considerations that make it rational to lose or give up hope (3.2).

3.1 *Practical Identities*

By ‘practical identity’, we mean a set of commitments that an agent has that single out a certain conception of that agent’s life as worth living (from the perspective of the agent) and certain considerations as reason-giving in virtue of that fact. For example, having the practical identity of a parent involves certain commitments. First and foremost, there is the commitment to seeing the needs of one’s child as reason-giving. Further, parents entertain beliefs about the value of this and similar commitments and their resultant actions, e.g., the belief that supporting and being prepared to make sacrifices for one’s child are part of what makes one’s life valuable. Similarly, one’s practical identity as a political activist might involve being committed to certain ideals in such a way that a particular set of activities is seen to bestow value on one’s life and certain consequences of one’s actions are viewed as being particularly relevant to who one is.

With this understanding of practical identity, we follow Christine Korsgaard’s suggestion that human beings have a distinct form of identity, namely a ‘norm-governed or practical form of identity’.²³ To be able to act, Korsgaard argues, an agent must be unified in a very specific way. This unity is not a natural feature of agents. Rather, an agent has a *responsibility* to constitute her unified identity. A central thought is that this activity of self-constitution consists in choosing and acting in accordance with certain norms and principles. A ‘particular practical identity’, Korsgaard claims, just is ‘a set of principles, the dos and don’ts of being a teacher or a citizen, say.’²⁴ That is, one’s practical identity is constituted by the

23 Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution. Agency, Identity and Integrity*, xii.

24 Ibid., 21.

norms of different roles that in turn provide us with ‘the sources of our reason’.²⁵ Furthermore, endorsing the particular reasons that are made available through a particular role or aspect of your overall identity is a way of *valuing* yourself: Your practical identity is ‘a description under which you value yourself and find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking’.²⁶ If one is to achieve the intrinsic good of living a life worthy of one’s own respect, one must therefore endorse one’s actions under some description. Korsgaard contends that most practical identities are not constructed *ex nihilo* by particular agents, but are rather discovered by them as already available in our shared traditions. In such cases, we have reasons to adopt and maintain our particular identities because this enables us to ‘express the value we set on our human identity’.²⁷

How does this conception of a practical identity relate to the rationality of fundamental hope? Assume, for example, that you value yourself under the description of being a political activist (which means, for instance, that you recognize the obligation to participate in democratic politics, obligations to other members of a movement, etc.) or as a parent (recognizing certain obligations towards a child). We suggest that conceiving of oneself as a parent or activist involves not only accepting certain obligations and performing certain actions but also entertaining certain hopes. For example, it belongs to the self-understanding of parents that they hope for the happiness of their children, just as it belongs to the self-conception of political activists that they hope for political change. Further, part of what being a parent involves is not only entertaining hopes for one’s child – for example his or her future success – but also seeing oneself as being *justified* in doing so. Seeing some of your beliefs (e.g., in the possibility of political change) as licensing hopeful activities and seeing yourself as having reason to act in ways that are distinctive of hope is a constitutive part of what endorsing such a role means. To be more precise, it is true of many

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 24.

27 Ibid., 212.

hopes that they *contingently follow* from particular identities. I might decide to pursue a career as a philosopher, and this might lead at some point in my career to the hope that I will one day hold a particular position in the faculty. It should be clear, however, that my practical identity as a philosopher does not necessarily depend on this particular hope. By contrast, other hopes seem to be constitutive of what it means to be a philosopher, such as the hope that I will engage in meaningful philosophical discussions or will advance solid arguments for interesting theses. It seems true of many roles that they are defined by reference to uncertain future outcomes to which the person relates in the mode of hoping. To engage in hopeful activities and to see oneself as being justified in doing so, in these cases, is constitutive of one's identity, and agents have reason to continue to do so to the extent that they have reason to sustain their practical identity. In such a case, the appeal: 'Don't give up hope!' is highly relevant.²⁸

While Korsgaard's account explains why we must have some particular identity in order to be unified agents, one could still object that particular roles and practical identities are contingent and can be abandoned, and that there is therefore no harm in giving up hope that constitutes a *particular* identity as long as one can reconstitute one's unity as an agent under some *other* description. This would mean that it is always possible (and can perhaps be rational) to give up the hopes connected to a particular identity. We do not want to deny that changes in practical identity might occur and that we might even have reasons for such changes, which also involve the loss of hope. We discuss the question of when loss of hope is rational in the next subsection. Here, however, we want to focus on reasons we have to *maintain* hope. Therefore, we need only argue for the claim that it is sometimes

28 Of course, we should not assume that people usually consciously evaluate their hopes in these terms. But that does not mean that these are not the reasons to which they respond in their evaluations of their hope, even if they may not spell it out to themselves this way. When people consciously or implicitly weigh reasons for maintaining or abandoning hope, they will often be sensitive to the fact that giving up their hopes might result in their becoming a different person.

rational for people not to want to give up some of the particular identities they have.

To better understand why we sometimes have reason to maintain a particular outlook on life that is constituted by responsiveness to specific reasons, it is worth turning to Charles Taylor's classic essay 'What is Human Agency?'. Taylor defends the thesis that part of what it is to be a person is to engage in what he calls 'strong evaluations'.²⁹ Strong evaluations are second-order evaluations of our desires (i.e., evaluations that guide the incorporation of certain desires into our rational agency) that are guided by 'qualitative distinctions of worth'.³⁰ Taylor argues that, at least in some cases, we may refuse to incorporate a desire into our agency not necessarily because this would block us from achieving our ends (such as when we forgo dessert to maintain a healthy weight) but because we view certain desires as *intrinsically more valuable* than others. Such an evaluation presupposes a normative outlook on life that consists in a certain interpretation of our self. When evaluating whether to start a family in the suburbs or join a religious community in India, for instance, we must not only judge which action would result in a higher overall satisfaction of our desires or ends but also decide what kind of person we want to be, i.e., we have to decide what kinds of desires or ends count as relevant to who we are or want to become in the first place. In other words, we can only describe our actions as being guided by reasons if we have constituted our self as the kind of agent for whom certain things have a certain normative import³¹ – and this means as an agent who endorses a certain vocabulary of strong evaluations. If we are capable of performing such strong evaluations – and Taylor claims that this capacity is 'essential to our notion of the human subject'³² – then we must have a (mostly non-articulated³³)

29 Taylor, 'What Is Human Agency?'

30 Ibid., 17.

31 See also Taylor, 'Self-Interpreting Animals,' 48.

32 Taylor, 'What Is Human Agency?' 28.

33 See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, 21.

framework of worth from within which we evaluate. Such frameworks, however, are themselves not chosen on the basis of an independent standard. Rather, according to Taylor, they are a predicament within which we find ourselves and which we can only explore by means of interpreting and understanding them better. That is, each decision about whether it would be acceptable to be some other kind of agent must be made from within the framework of evaluation that constitutes us as agents in the present.³⁴ This provides an answer to the question of what reasons we have to remain within a particular framework (a question that Korsgaard's account does not answer): We have reason to preserve a particular identity and the hopefulness associated with it if the values that are accessible from within our current identities disqualify taking on an alternative to that particular identity. Only at first glance does this appear to be an exceptional situation. Most people who endorse strong valuations – whether ethical, aesthetic or religious – would view the possibility of losing their responsiveness to their respective values as a loss of normative sensibility.³⁵ In other words, losing such an identity might make certain values inaccessible – values that are fundamental to their being the kinds of agents they are.³⁶ Taylor thus identifies the conditions under which it is neither possible nor rational to give up a particular identity and the hopes connected with it.³⁷

34 However, this does not mean that our self-evaluation must remain within that framework. As Taylor notes, there is still the possibility of *radically re-evaluating* our constitutive evaluations: 'in radical re-evaluations by definition the most basic terms, those in which other evaluations are carried on, are precisely what is in question' (Taylor, 'What Is Human Agency?' 40). But he adds that '[t]here is certainly no metalanguage available in which I can assess rival self-interpretations [...]' On the contrary, the re-evaluation is carried on in the formulae available but with a stance of attention, as it were, to what these formulae are meant to articulate and with a readiness to receive any gestalt shift in our view of the situation' (Ibid.).

35 See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, 19f.

36 'Put counterfactually, they are saying that were they to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn't know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them' (Ibid., 28).

37 Ibid., 30.

3.2 *When to Give up Hope*

While there are hopes that are mainly rational because they provide the agent with some benefit (and that therefore ought to be given up once that agent incurs more costs than benefits as a result of maintaining them), the idea of fundamental hope also allows us to acknowledge a broader range of issues arising from the question of when to give up hope. If we accept Korsgaard's or Taylor's account of practical identity, when is it rational to give up hope? There are two ways in which people can acquire reasons to give up certain hopes. In the first kind of case, people stop treating their belief in the hoped-for outcome's possibility as licensing hopeful activities either because they revise their beliefs about its probability or because they come to view that original probability as no longer sufficient for licensing hopeful activities. A young political activist who views the low probability of achieving significant political change as nonetheless licensing hopeful activities may later in life take herself only to be justified in engaging in activities that are directed to more probable outcomes (such as small-scale change for the better). If this development changes the lines of practical reasoning that are open to her and the description under which she values herself (as it often does), the answer to whether such change is reasonable depends on whether she has reason to preserve her 'old' identity in the face of possible change.

In the second kind of case, people cease to engage in hopeful activities because they are either no longer sure that their practical identity constitutively relies on those activities (imagine a parent who gives up fantasizing that her children will be successful because she no longer takes her identity as a loving parent to require this kind of fantasizing) or because, more fundamentally, they question the value of that particular practical identity itself. In all of these cases, we can ask whether people have reason to maintain hope, and this question does not seem to be adequately answered by evaluating whether doing so would promote their ends. Rather, the answer seems to lie in whether or not their hope is intrinsically valuable in terms of the outlook on life that it supports.

Drawing on Taylor, we can provide an even more nuanced description of how we might lose hope: We must distinguish between *external factors*, that is, causal factors that make us reject our strong evaluations (such as brainwashing),³⁸ and *internal factors*, that is, grounds of losing hope that are connected to our sensitivity to reasons. There are two cases of such internal factors – one having to do with the *intrinsic worth* of an identity, the other having to do with its *availability*.

The first case, the case of a person's reasonably losing hope because she can no longer view her identity as worthy of being preserved, is to be understood, following Taylor, on a model of self-interpretation: Our attachments to values are accessible to us only under a specific articulation.³⁹ Through reinterpreting that articulation in response to experience, we at once better understand and change our framework of strong evaluation. Taylor considers the example of a person who belongs to a minority racial group and who feels uneasy in certain social situations.⁴⁰ While she may at first describe her reaction as an appropriate case of shame in response to her inability to 'fit in', thus implicitly adopting a framework of evaluation in terms of which she constructs an identity, she might gradually come to redescribe her reaction as an acute awareness of subtle discrimination. But if identity depends at base on the framework that we use to understand our being in the world, such a redescription will also change that person's identity. By redescribing the normative import of the situation, she thereby also changes the basic framework of evaluation, which might then lead her to revise her understanding of herself. While the former self-description supports strong evaluations that are intrinsically connected to certain hopes (fitting in better, being socially accepted, etc.), such hopes might later be seen as pathological and submissive, in need of being replaced by other hopes (for example, the hope of finding a community of one's own or of

38 Taylor, 'What Is Human Agency?' 35.

39 See also Ibid., 25; Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, 26.

40 Taylor, 'Self-Interpreting Animals,' 69.

working to make the larger community more accepting).⁴¹ Over time, people often come to view the hopes of their former selves as resulting from a confused interpretation of their values. They might therefore judge that their former hopes are no longer supported by their current, improved understanding of what they value.

An example of the second case, i.e., where an identity ceases to be available, are people in contemporary society who endorse strong evaluations connected to identities that are no longer socially supported (e.g., the identity of a 19th-Century nobleman, or a tenured professor or unionized worker as these were defined in the 1960s). To adopt an identity that cannot be realized is to set up standards of value for one's own life that cannot be fulfilled, but it is also irrational in a more theoretical sense. Such an identity is characterized by attachments to certain fantasies and anticipations that entail a commitment to a false belief, namely the belief that the hoped-for outcomes are possible. This draws our attention to the fact that what it means for a person to rationally maintain and endorse a certain identity is a matter not only of having the necessary self-understanding but also of living in the right kind of *social context* – a context that in such cases is not only temporarily lacking but irreversibly lost.⁴² If such a context is missing, this does not necessarily *cause* a person to lose the relevant hopes, but it provides her with a *reason* to give up on them.

A particularly striking example of such a loss of hope can be found in Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope* (2006). Lear describes a situation in which *all* hope for a particular outcome is lost as a result of the destruction of a culture. Lear offers an interpretation of how the Crow Nation, a Native American tribe, experienced the loss of their culture after being forcibly moved to a reservation. As a result of their inability to engage in activities that were central to their self-understanding, the Crow experienced a loss of meaning. Lear argues that this loss of meaning can also be described as a loss of particular hopes – such as the hope for success in central activities

41 Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' 26.

42 Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' 33ff.

like hunting – that they took to be essential to who they were. Lear also argues, however, that there is a kind of hope that may survive the loss of all particular hopes. He describes the chief of the Crow Nation, Plenty Coups, as an exceptional personality who was able to retain ‘radical hope’, which ‘anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it’.⁴³

It seems plausible to assume that such a general sense of hope (or perhaps better, ‘hopefulness’) could survive the loss of all particular hopes. Indeed, Lear seems to have singled out a kind of hope that is especially relevant in cases of changing from one particular identity to another, and which allows for the preservation of a fundamental sense of identity. He holds that, even though the Crow Nation was ‘dead’ in terms of their cultural self-understanding, radical hope allowed them to survive in more than a biological sense, as this hope embodied a belief in the ‘possibility of new Crow possibilities’.⁴⁴

Given this discussion, it is important to note that fundamental hope as we have understood it thus far is not identical to radical hope, because we conceive of fundamental hope as constitutive of one’s *particular* practical identity. Lear’s analysis draws attention to the fact that it might be helpful to distinguish between *particular* fundamental hopes (of which there can be many) that are constitutive of one’s particular practical identity and a *general* kind of fundamental hope that is constitutive of one’s practical identity in the most general sense.

This discussion additionally shows that hopes can be reasonable or unreasonable independently of whether they provide any benefit to the agent. This does not mean that unreasonable hopes are strictly irrational: A person can be non-culpably mistaken about whether her hopes are achievable or about whether her identity is indeed valuable. She can therefore be justified in hoping even though, from the perspective of an outsider who recognizes her mistaken beliefs, she might have no reason to do so.

43 Lear, ‘Radical Hope,’ 103.

44 Lear, ‘Radical Hope,’ 98.

Section 4: Prosaic Hope

One might object that our arguments for the claim that reasons for having and giving up hope are best understood in terms of practical identities rest on carefully selected examples. It is certainly true that all of us harbor many ‘prosaic’, everyday hopes that are not in any obvious sense constitutive of who we are. This does not mean, however, that these hopes are not responsive to reasons connected to our practical identities. First of all, the lack of connection might simply mean that we are not positively justified in maintaining these hopes in the face of countervailing reasons. This does not amount to saying that they are irrational. They become irrational only when we insulate them from countervailing reasons. The fact that many of our hopes are not constitutive of our identities might simply mean that these are not hopes we *ought* to sustain.

Second, it is true that, if understood as *tokens* of a mental attitude, many prosaic hopes (such as the hope that the weather will be good tomorrow) are not rational in virtue of the role they play in our practical identities. However, the fact that we are disposed to develop hopes of a certain *type* with some regularity and reliability under the right circumstances is often indeed essential to our being the kinds of people we are. When it comes to adequately performing the role of a parent, no particular instance of hope that one’s child will succeed in some activity is essential or irreplaceable. But certainly, a certain disposition to develop such hopes is indeed essential to properly performing the role of a parent. On the same note, even a committed political activist does not stand under an obligation to hope for a positive outcome with regard to any particular sequence of events. It might nonetheless be constitutive of their identity, however, to *be able* to develop hope when confronted with an appropriately attractive political movement. Finally, even the hope that the weather will be nice tomorrow might be an actualization of a certain hopeful perspective on life and of a disposition to hope without which a person would be so radically different (in a normatively significant sense) that she has reason to protect and sustain her ability to hope in this way. Furthermore, in cases of prosaic hope it is especially evident that one’s hope cannot be rationalized in terms

of end promotion, since those who are less susceptible to this kind of hope often pursue their goals as effectively as those who hope (and thus are more vulnerable to disappointment).

Section 5: Conclusion

Against Martin's incorporation account, we have argued that we cannot properly view reasons for hoping as exclusively instrumental reasons of rational end promotion. Instead, we have laid out an alternative analysis, according to which the reasons to which at least an important subclass of hopes are responsive (if they are rational hopes) are the reasons we have in virtue of having a particular practical identity. Those reasons can make it rational to continue to hope. We do not want to claim that hope is only rational in terms of what it preserves – it can also be valuable to *adopt* a hopeful attitude. An account of reasons for acquiring new hopes and their relation to our practical identity must be left for another occasion. Thus, our account of reasons for hope is certainly not exhaustive. When it comes to a phenomenon as complex as hope, no single analysis can capture all the aspects of its role in human life. What our account emphasizes is that reasons for hope are not exhausted by instrumental considerations. What makes the life of the hopeful person better is not that she is more effective but that hope enables her to remain the person she is.⁴⁵

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